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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of the main reasons why secondary teachers supported their schools' efforts at educational reform through membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools. The Coalition is a grassroots reform movement focused on improving classroom teaching and learning and helping students to use their minds well. Researchers conducted interviews, observations, and surveys in eight schools. Overall, the primary reasons for support were the personal transformations teachers experienced and the benefits they felt students derived from a more personalized approach to teaching and learning. Although many individual teachers supported Coalition philosophy, in most of the study schools, there was no consensus regarding the need for change nor the appropriateness of the Coalition philosophy. Some teachers, although supportive in principle, became opposed as they worked to implement the Coalition's nine common principles in their classrooms and shape policy schoolwide. The reasons teachers opposed the Coalition included questioning the need for change, philosophical difficulties with the principles, incomplete socialization to Coalition programs, political concerns such as equity and ownership of the change process, and increased workload. The nine common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools are appended. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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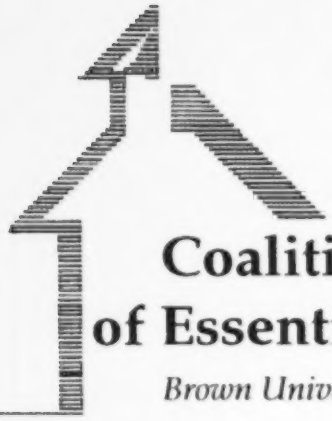

Coalition of Essential Schools

Brown University

Teachers Talk about Coalition Reforms at their Schools

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THE SCHOOL ETHNOGRAPHY PROJECT (No. 7)

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ABOUT THE SCHOOL ETHNOGRAPHY PROJECT

The School Ethnography Project was a six-year, independent study *of* the Coalition of Essential Schools, not *by* it. The ethnographers secured their own funding, set their own priorities, and selected their own sites. The project was not intended to evaluate the Coalition of Essential Schools; rather, the intent was to document broadly what occurred in schools as a consequence of the Coalition's reform efforts. Beginning in the fall of 1986, the researchers examined a sample of eight "charter members" of the Coalition and the professional development activities offered by the Coalition's Central Staff for member (and potential member) schools. Most of the research was conducted in the eight study-site schools and focused on two broad questions about the Coalition's Common Principles: How are the Common Principles interpreted by individual schools? And, how do those involved in Essential schools (teachers, administrators, and students) implement the principles as they are developed in each setting?

October 1992

Introduction

When the students are involved, they learn a lot more, and they learn a lot more from each other. There's a lot of things that are not traditional content but that can be very worthwhile experiences for students. . . . I'd say the insides of an earthworm really aren't important anymore.

— *Biology Teacher*

I have more job satisfaction this year. I mostly feel that it's because of the feedback that I get from students. These are low-level things, but they smile when they see you instead of growling. They'll talk to you. They will respond when you reach out. They want to be acknowledged and helped. They don't have that hostile veneer. . . . I'm not sure if this is because of the Essential school, but I feel a real satisfaction when I develop an activity and the kids like it, because hours and hours went into it. And that motivates a teacher to continue working hard like that.

— *Science Teacher*

"The shopping mall high school" — that's exactly the kind of high school I went to. You could take anything. Everything was offered. . . . I had a great time in high school — and I loved every teacher I had. I had the best music teacher, the best art teachers, I really had good math, good history teachers. I had a great time in high school and it was one of those huge, three-thousand-kid high schools, but I loved it. At this school, unlike "the shopping mall high school," we have eliminated to the bone. These kids don't have anything extra.

— *Art Teacher*

To a degree, "We can do better" was the statement. But I think really the message that people seemed to get was, "What you're doing is all wrong." It was a negative message rather than a positive message and it really put people on the defensive.

— *English Teacher*

In this paper we provide an overview of the main reasons why teachers supported their school's efforts at educational reform through membership in the Coalition of Essential Schools. In a sample of eight study schools, the primary reasons for support were the personal transformations teachers experienced and the benefits they felt students derived from a more personalized approach to teaching and learning.

Although many individual teachers supported Coalition philosophy, in most of our study schools there was no consensus regarding the need for change nor the appropriateness of Coalition philosophy. Further, some teachers — although supportive in principle — became opposed as they worked to implement the Common Principles in their classrooms and to shape policy schoolwide. Therefore, we also examine teachers' opposition to membership and several problems that arose at our study schools after they joined the Coalition of Essential Schools and as faculty realized what Coalition membership meant in practice.

The teachers whose voices we present were selected because they represent opinions widely held across numerous school sites. To provide some context for the teachers' remarks that follow, we provide brief descriptions of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the School Ethnography Project, and our eight study schools.

THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

The Coalition of Essential Schools was founded in 1984 by Theodore R. Sizer, former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former headmaster at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Coalition philosophy is the product of thinking, research, and writing that emerged from A Study of High Schools, a five-year, multisite study of American secondary schools.[1] Drawing on his experiences in schools and the general shortcomings he perceived in American education, Sizer wrote a compelling narrative about his findings, *Horace's Compromise*, and

devised a philosophy, codified in the Common Principles (see Appendix A), which formed the basis of the Coalition.

Prior to and at the time of his book's publication, Sizer and his associates made numerous speeches promoting his philosophy. Based on what he perceived as an enthusiastic reception for his ideas among the teachers and school administrators he met, Sizer recruited schools willing to experiment with his philosophy and put together a small, university-based staff to assist this effort. From an initial membership of twelve "charter" schools and a Central Staff of three persons in December 1985, the Coalition grew to include more than four hundred schools nationwide and a Central Staff of more than forty by the end of 1992.

In part, this expansion resulted from a partnership called Re:Learning, which the Coalition initiated with the Denver-based Education Commission of the States (ECS), a "non-profit, nationwide interstate compact formed to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve education" (Re:Learning 1989:6). The Coalition focused on school-site reform, while ECS worked with state and local governmental agencies to create a policy environment conducive to school-site change. Most of the recent Coalition member schools joined through states that are part of the Re:Learning partnership.

All of the study schools described in this paper were charter member schools and, while two are located in Re:Learning states, all of their Coalition memberships predate Re:Learning.

In proclaiming the diversity of its membership, the Coalition stresses that it is a grassroots reform movement focused on improving classroom teaching and learning and helping students to "use their minds well." Unlike many reform efforts, the Coalition emphatically rejects centralized and standardized solutions to school problems. Moreover, the nine Common Principles that form the foundation of this reform are ambiguous by design: each member school is to interpret and act upon the principles within its own cultural and institutional context.

THE SCHOOL ETHNOGRAPHY PROJECT

In August of 1986, the School Ethnography Project began a multiyear ethnographic documentation and research project focused on the schools and staff that were partners in the Coalition of Essential Schools. At this time the schools were still in the initial stages of their restructuring efforts. Data collection continued until June of 1990.

Specifically, our research entailed observing classes, after-school activities, planning meetings, and other school-based activities. We interviewed students, teachers, and administrators about their work, about proposed or implemented changes, and about their future plans. We conducted a survey of 1,500 students in eleven Essential schools and collected related data about the schools — such as newspaper articles, yearbooks, and other school publications, faculty- and student-authored materials, and materials stored in Coalition archives about individual schools.

Although our research focused primarily on school sites, we also attended Coalition staff meetings, conferences, and workshops; interviewed Central Staff members; and generally stayed abreast of developments within the Central Staff.

THE STUDY SCHOOLS

Of our eight study schools, six were public high schools (three urban, two suburban, one rural), one was a private secondary school, and one was a newly created secondary school. All were located in eastern states. Changing demographics were at issue in most of our study schools. For example, at one school the student population fell by as much as 30 percent over the course of our research.

Prior to joining the Coalition, the schools varied in their commitment to change. Only two of the eight schools had held faculty referenda on Coalition membership before joining. The other six schools joined primarily because of the initiative of the principal or superintendent. Three of the eight schools continue to be identified by the Coalition as schools that are sustaining and deepening their change efforts.

Under our agreement with the study schools, we have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the schools and their staffs.

Barrett

Barrett Preparatory School is a small, private, K–12 school in a large, multicultural metropolitan area. A strong commitment to minority recruitment on the part of the administration has meant that the sizable Greek, Italian, and Soviet Jewish populations at the school have been complemented

by an increasing number of African-American students. The student body is heterogeneous in ability as well. Most students plan to attend college, and increasingly the school has placed students in desirable colleges and universities.

In the spring of 1985, after consulting with interested faculty, the headmaster prepared the Barrett Educational Plan, a statement of the school's new guiding philosophy, which paralleled the Coalition's Common Principles in many ways. It was then discussed among the faculty and formally accepted by the school's Board of Trustees. Barrett joined the Coalition as one of the earliest member schools in 1985. Although initially enthusiastic, for various reasons many faculty became resistant to the changes as they were implemented. At this time, Barrett has limited involvement with the Coalition.

Elliston

Elliston High School is a suburban high school whose primary clientele are the children of executives who work in local divisions of several large corporations in a nearby city of approximately 240,000. The school district serves two neighboring communities, Elliston and nearby Parkview, whose residents often purchase homes in these towns with the expectation that their children will receive an excellent public education. Elliston is a sprawling suburban community with numerous subdivisions, in close proximity to the urban center and to several local, exclusive country clubs. Parents are actively involved in the education of their children.

Elliston High School has an excellent academic reputation; the school has won numerous awards for excellence, including being ranked first in the nation in an independent survey of public high schools in 1988. The approximately 1,000-student high school offers students an array of courses, including a large selection of electives. Additionally, there are numerous "tracks" for students, intended to allow teachers to tailor their content and pace of instruction to meet students' varying needs. Most Elliston students are white, although as the school is a voluntary participant in the nearby urban center's educational opportunities program, urban students — primarily minority (most often African-American) — can elect to be bused to Elliston High.

Many of Elliston's students expect to work hard, do well, and attend prestigious colleges and universities. Virtually all students complete high school and most (85–90 percent) pursue higher education. Elliston joined the Coalition in 1985 and spent the next three years engaged in a long, thoughtful process of determining what, if anything, it wished to change. Ultimately, the faculty decided to withdraw from the Coalition in 1989, affirming aspects of their current practice and philosophy, most particularly their commitment to comprehensive education, as they did so.

Evans Hill

Evans Hill, a small village, is one of a patchwork quilt of tiny communities in a county adjacent to a large metropolitan area and is known for its residential desirability for commuters and for its excellent school system. A walk through the hallways of the community's public school (a K–12 self-contained district) provides a sense of the community's ability to provide for their children: one sees computer labs, small classes (in 1986 the student/teacher ratio was 15-to-1 and average class size approximately twenty), a large library, several auditoriums, and a cafeteria with a short-order menu and student lounge.

Evans Hill High enjoys a favorable reputation, with graduates frequently attending Ivy League universities and exclusive smaller colleges. The student population is 96 percent white, 3 percent Asian, and less than 1 percent "other."

The principal and a small group of interested faculty initiated Coalition membership, but this membership was problematic from the start. Faculty resistance, coupled with the arrival of a new school administration in the midst of the change process, led those committed to Coalition ideas to feel isolated and embattled. While the school remains a Coalition member, its faculty and local community have never wholeheartedly embraced Coalition change.

Green Valley

Green Valley Junior-Senior High School is located in the town of Green Valley, which has the second lowest per capita income in an Appalachian state that provides little support for local education. The school is small, with roughly 350 students enrolled in grades seven through twelve and a staff of slightly more than thirty.

While the physical plant is sparse, there is a sense of community, life, and excitement about the school. Much of what occurs at Green Valley Junior-

Senior High emanates from its principal, Stuart Tucker. He came to the school in 1981 after leaving a similar position at a relatively prominent middle school. The school that he took over in 1981 had had a troubled recent history. In the late seventies, the school faced many problems, including low teacher salaries, high dropout and absentee rates (both 20 percent), and low college attendance (8 percent). When Tucker began working at Green Valley, the school had a traditional structure which he and the faculty slowly redesigned. Tucker's and the Coalition's philosophy corresponded well, and Green Valley became one of the first Coalition members in 1985. The school presently continues its membership and is often cited for its greatly improved dropout and college attendance rates.

Lewis High School

Located in a mid-Atlantic city of 750,000 residents, Lewis High is a "zoned," or neighborhood, comprehensive school[2] that enrolls an entirely African-American student population of about 1,100. About three-quarters of the faculty are also African-American.

In some ways Lewis fits the typical conception of an urban high school. Many school doors are locked or chained closed to restrict the flow of outsiders into the school. Classes are generally large; most enroll over thirty students. Yet, Lewis has a comfortable, "small school" feel as well. In the classrooms and hallways, students, teachers, and administrators seem at ease with one another. The school offers an array of extracurricular activities, and participating students and faculty appear enthusiastic about them. Most members of the Lewis "family" (a common descriptor of the school by those associated with it) freely acknowledge pride in their school. Although Lewis relocated for building renovations from the fall of 1988 through the spring of 1991, in its permanent location the school is unquestionably a "neighborhood school," with many families choosing to send more than one child to the school.

When Lewis began its Coalition involvement in 1985, the school enrolled nearly 2,000 students. Enrollment decreased by approximately 900 students during major building renovations, precipitating a concern with job security by some faculty.

In terms of our research sample, Lewis High is an interesting case: while there were four school-within-a-school (SWAS) reform efforts in our sample of study schools, Lewis was the only one that expanded its SWAS program throughout the five years of our research — adding more students as well as faculty members to their program every year.

Russell

Russell High School, an arts and communications magnet, is one of four magnet high schools in an eastern city of 150,000 residents. Besides its magnet program, Russell offers a Coalition SWAS program, English as a second language, special education, and a traditional comprehensive program. Nearly 80 percent of the student body are minorities, a far higher percentage than in the other magnet schools in the city; falling enrollment rates at Russell in the 1970s were later offset by busing students from the low-income, multiethnic Westside. In the late 1980s, Russell's dropout rate was estimated at 40 to 50 percent, and student "course failures" numbered around 1,800 annually, or, on average, nearly two per student.

Russell joined the Coalition in late 1984 following a vote in which two-thirds of the school's faculty approved starting a SWAS. Initial recruitment for the SWAS team was accomplished through an application process open to all Russell teachers. Four of the five teachers chosen were Russell veterans, and all were relieved from teaching responsibilities for a half-year to plan the SWAS program for the fall. From the beginning, the school's SWAS had ties to a local university which provided consultation services and other support.

The SWAS program enrolled 104 ninth-graders in its first year (1986–87) and planned to double its numbers each year, but yearly enrollments fell below expectations, in part because some Russell programs competed for the same students. By September 1990, the SWAS program encompassed all four grades, enrolling about 290 students — 31 percent of the approximately 950 students enrolled at Russell — with a staff of fifteen teachers. Because of limited faculty interest and overall program expense, there are no further plans for SWAS expansion.

Attendance and dropout rates have showed significant improvement in the SWAS, but there have also been problems with faculty tensions and divisiveness, ambivalence about university involvement at Russell, and specific problems with components of the SWAS design.

Silas Ridge

Silas Ridge is an eastern city of 65,000 inhabitants. Located in the heart of the city, Silas Ridge High is a comprehensive high school of slightly more than 1,000 students. Historically dominated by a middle-class, white population, the school has enrolled increasing numbers of minority students (primarily Southeast Asians and Eastern Europeans) and, owing to shifting economic circumstances, nearly half the student body qualifies for the "reduced lunch" program. Most Silas Ridge students are grouped according to a five-tier tracking system, intended to serve the needs of students headed for Ivy League educations as well as of those with little understanding of either English or the United States.

In January 1985, Silas Ridge High School became a charter member of the Coalition due to the work of Katherine Shaw, a Silas Ridge teacher who would soon become the principal, and a volunteer group of teachers. The school began with a year-and-a-half-long planning phase, which involved volunteer teachers and administrators, followed by the school starting a SWAS program with a team of four teachers — English, history, math, and science. Although the Coalition teachers themselves enjoyed the Essential school structure, philosophical and personal differences within the team complicated their efforts and, by the second year, tensions related to perceived preferential treatment of the SWAS teachers by the principal had emerged. Eventually, the SWAS was dissolved.

Silas Ridge's Coalition program spent the next few years in a state of limbo. In the spring of 1990, Silas Ridge held a faculty referendum on whether to remain in the Coalition. Twenty-two persons (42 percent of those who participated) voted to continue Coalition membership. Fifteen people (28 percent) supported continued membership but felt they could not be actively involved.[3] Sixteen (30 percent) felt membership should be terminated. With the SWAS program dismantled, however, Coalition reform at Silas Ridge appears limited to ad hoc planning and experimentation.

Wade

A growing number of schools are being designed and founded using the Common Principles of the Coalition as their underlying philosophy. The first and one of the most well-known of these is Wade Secondary School. Founded by Helen Markham, an educator and innovator with a history of involvement in alternative elementary school education, Wade began with approximately eighty seventh-graders in 1985. The school added one grade per year for six years until it reached its present size of approximately 450 students and graduated its first senior class in 1991.

Wade is located in a large urban system which annually spent, on average, about $5,500 per pupil in the mid-1980s. While situated in an area of poverty, violence, and joblessness, Wade is part of a school district that is widely acknowledged to favor innovation. The district has supported the fledgling school by providing political support for it and by assisting with fund-raising. While Wade is an alternative public school and students are selected for admission, Markham has sought to maintain several balances in selecting students, including achievement and racial and socio-economic representation. Throughout our research period, the racial and ethnic mix at Wade was approximately 40 percent African-American, 35 percent Hispanic, 9 percent white, 6 percent Asian, and 10 percent biracial.

The administration and staff were committed to building a multicultural faculty, and teachers, administrators, and students stressed the supportiveness, caring, and sense of shared purpose among staff and students. Students often used Coalition reform rhetoric with ease, infusing it with an active and pragmatic sense of purpose. The school's structure, curriculum, and dominant pedagogical techniques have been based on and continue to reflect the central aims of Coalition philosophy.

Support for Coalition Reform

Our research revealed seven reasons why teachers in our study schools advocated Coalition membership: a sense of professional and personal transformation and opportunity derived from Coalition ideas; the restructuring of school schedules that most Coalition programs initiated; the increased satisfaction that personalizing classrooms had for teachers and, in their opinions, students; the sense of having a say in the decisions that affected their professional lives; the opportunity to request and/or to design their own professional development activities; the feeling of being part of a national network of like-minded schools and educators; and the belief that their school faculties had become more reflective about their profession and their schools' character.

Although unique circumstances at individual schools often engendered additional reasons for supporting Coalition reform efforts, this list provides a broad overview of the most appreciated outcomes at the study schools.

PROFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Many of the teachers who enthusiastically embraced Coalition philosophy discussed the professional changes they had experienced from their association with the Coalition, often stressing a sense of having more freedom to experiment than before the school's involvement in the Coalition. Often they experienced a sense of personal change as well.[4] To reflect some of the many perspectives that we heard throughout our research, we have included two statements of professional transformation from our field notes.

Sharon, a Biology Teacher

Sharon, who taught biology in an urban school, described the changes she had witnessed in her students during the almost twenty years she had taught in that district — and how a shifting student population presented her with new challenges that her more traditional approaches to teaching seemed unable to address. Sharon found that using Coalition ideas in her classroom was a positive means to address these challenges:

> I entered [this school district] in September 1971 with visions of teaching my students protein synthesis . . . and other intricacies of biology which I had eagerly studied as an undergraduate biology major. It was satisfying for me to observe my tenth- and eleventh-grade students — challenged with biological concepts and motivated about the wonders of their living world — rise to a high level of expectation in the laboratory and the classroom. Many of my students attended top-notch universities and colleges, and it was not unusual for me during the late seventies and early eighties to receive a visit or letter [saying]: "Your message in my yearbook came true! I'm a physician" or "Thanks so much for the encouragement to go to college. I'm a doctoral candidate in archaeology."
>
> The pride and gratification I felt waned in the early eighties when, nationally, student proficiency in science declined . . . [and] half of all eleventh-graders thought science was not personally useful. At [my] high school, the negative attitude toward science resulted in low achievement. More than 60 percent of the students had failing grades in biology and were not electing to take advanced sciences. Academic molecular biology was of little or no interest to my urban students. "When are we going to get to the good stuff?" they would ask.
>
> Isolated and frustrated in an inner-city school where security, not curriculum revision, was a top priority, I began searching for solutions. How could I teach biology so students would see it as "good stuff?" The principles of student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach lured me into an association with the Coalition of Essential Schools. I did not get answers but I was encouraged with guiding principles and a support system to search for a way to awaken the desire to learn in my students.
>
> Consulting with Coalition staff and with the chorus of "This stuff is boring!" ringing in my ears, I began to design a new curriculum with the focus of relating biology to students' everyday experiences. The starting point was teaching biology thematically (e.g., unity in diversity, continuity, and interaction) while always connecting one theme to the other. . . . I have been able to create lessons which demonstrate to students that there is a very

real connection between the study of biology and their own lives and that learning is a wonderfully empowering experience. . . .

Spending less time lecturing, I believe teachers can provide students with countless opportunities to explore the wonders of biology. Adolescents, by nature, learn better working with peers rather than in isolation. Stressing both process *and* content and providing students with appropriate active learning strategies — cooperative learning, jigsaws (peer teaching), hands-on activities, and laboratory experiments — our students are engaged in their learning and develop lifelong skills. My success with these strategies and the new curriculum has been rewarding; yet I know that readjustments and fine tuning are required. My profession is [again] exciting and stimulating.

Sharon considered her struggle to promote active and collaborative learning among her students quite worthwhile. While she was clear that her first efforts to make biology relevant and interesting to her students were not the be-all and end-all solution to addressing the needs of a changed student population, she viewed herself as reinvigorated — a feeling that, according to her, had been lost prior to experimenting with student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach approaches.

Fred, a Chemistry Teacher

Fred, an experienced teacher who attended a Coalition workshop, was initially skeptical about whether he would find anything relevant to *his* teaching and *his* students' learning. In reflecting on his professional transformation, Fred talked about how and why he changed his approach, while acknowledging the difficulties his colleagues might have in embracing a similar approach, since they were still enmeshed in their own patterns of "business as usual."

> I think you can take an old-dog, traditional teacher and change him. Here you're looking at one. People almost fifty years old can be dramatically changed. . . . It's not a matter of age because . . . I've been teaching twenty-five years [and] I see this as more productive. I'm trying to change. So an old dog can be taught new tricks. But you see, I'm still relatively isolated and there's a few things I'm sharing with . . . the two other chemistry teachers [in my department] and they say, "Hey, this is good. This is interesting," you know, but all they can do is look [at] it.
>
> What happens is, once you start teaching and you start following the syllabus and the textbook, you get locked into the syllabus and the textbook. . . . You get into that rut and you can't get out of it. . . . I think that's where a [Coalition] workshop, or at least a summer session, is so important. I went to the [math and science] workshop sort of indifferent. You know, I'd heard all the scuttlebutt . . . [and I said,] "Well I'm going to see what this is all about." So I applied, and I was very happy I did. About halfway through that workshop, I changed almost overnight. I said "Hey, I got the idea now. I know what is going on here." One word turned me on and that was *engagement*.
>
> [Someone at the workshop asked me,] "Fred, wait a second. [Do] you understand the [Common] Principles?" I said, "No. I'm testing them, and I'm constantly challenging them." Because I constantly challenge them, I [even] bounced [some of my ideas] off Ted [Sizer the next] summer. But he came back . . . and convinced me. He gave me the argument I wanted to hear. . . . I mean I've been very satis[fied]; every time I've tested the principles, they were sound.

The Value of Transformation

Most of the teachers who talked about their professional transformations were veterans with more than ten years of experience, some with as many as twenty. In our study schools, the majority of teachers who got involved in Coalition SWAS programs or participated on committees planning implementation of Coalition ideas schoolwide were experienced teachers. But they were also teachers who had begun to question whether their established approach was really working, often because they sensed a lack of engagement on the part of their students. In some schools, they had clear-cut evidence that what they had been doing previously was not reaching many students: dropout rates were high, absenteeism often higher, and disorder and violence on school property had led to the situation that Sharon described earlier, "where security, not curriculum revision, was [the] top priority."

Other study schools, such as Fred's, were somewhat different: suburban, middle-to-upper-middle-class schools with virtually universal graduation and college attendance rates. These schools were not problem-free, and faculty attracted to the Coalition philosophy at these schools were usually still interested in making their students' learning more active.

The individuals who embraced Coalition philosophy and worked to change their classrooms did not simply change their attitudes toward teaching — *they did things differently in their classrooms.* Some of these developments included personalizing students' learning, reorganizing the school's schedule, and participating more actively in decision-making processes. Reflecting on the transformation that he observed in some teachers at his school, one principal commented, "The change in the approaches to teaching that occurred in a few staff members [because of Coalition membership] . . . was the most significant professional development activity that I've [ever] seen. They really transformed their approach[es] to teaching."

PERSONALIZING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Many teachers who were actively involved with their school's efforts to implement Coalition philosophy reported considerable satisfaction from their efforts to personalize student learning, one way being the use of "advisory" periods. When asked what they enjoyed about their school's reform efforts and what most benefited their students, some teachers discussed these periods. Others, such as the teacher quoted here, felt strongly that the entire structure of their SWAS program facilitated the increased personalization that students needed.

> Because of the Essential school setup, the teacher's role can be more intense. You see the kids in the morning and after school. It's easy to find kids because we're all on the same floor. I actually spend more time with students now. And because you're set up to coach, you can get to know them better because you actually have daily contact with each kid rather than not getting to speak to some students during an entire class. Coaching gives you that contact. And kids need to know that you respect and like them — that's the starting point. And respect comes in many forms: being prepared for class, making sure that the directions to an assignment are clear, and so on. I feel that I reach out to them in many ways, even just having small talks with students.

Many efforts to personalize student learning involved changing the class format. Teachers used cooperative learning techniques, peer editing, and other forms of group work to foster a classroom environment of trust and decency — both between students and teachers and among students — so that students would feel comfortable taking the risks teachers felt were necessary for more serious and consequential learning.

Rachel, an English Teacher

Rachel, a teacher in the Russell Essential school program, discussed her efforts to know her students better, the sharing that emerged among her students through their interdependence, and the sense of community that she felt this created.

> I know them well. They do lots of group work and [they] work on the same thing but at their own pace, so that brings them together to help each other. It's almost magical. They talk with each other about their work because they know and trust each other.
>
> And I can inspire them because I know them. I know what they've read. I know what they like to read. When a student says, for example, "I can't find a book I like," I know what to recommend because I know them. I'm not sure that I'd be able to do that under other circumstances. . . .
>
> For instance, I know that [one student] is learning disabled . . . and I wanted to help her as a special ed student *and* I wanted her to do the work. I don't think that I could have done what I did without knowing her as I did. When we did poetry the first quarter, I knew that she does sculpture, so I had her bring her sculpture to class and she lectured on poetry and art — symbolism, self. She compared her work to poetry, she discussed the medium she used, she gave us a definition of art. If I didn't know her, I couldn't [have done] that.
>
> [Overall,] I have more active student engagement. We do journal writing on a daily basis and group work on a weekly basis. I try to involve the whole class in discussion. . . . In the past, some kids you just stopped reaching

out to. They flunked all the tests and didn't do any work, and eventually you gave up. I didn't do that this year because the kids were here every day. There's no reason to give up if they're here. If a kid only comes to school once a month, why bother? . . . [Also] there's no tension in here now; . . . kids know how to treat others in here. Certain things are understood.

It's not so much that [my] role has changed but [that] it has intensified. There are a lot more kids who reach out for me. Kids who ordinarily wouldn't talk to teachers now do because they know they can trust us. So now we have more of an advisory role. . . .

And I feel I can discuss sensitive topics with them. . . . I think it's so healthy that kids are getting to talk about things [that affect them] and [to] think about their futures. I couldn't do that if I didn't have those kids in class this year and last year. And we're using *Annie John* as the basis for the Essential school's judiciary committee. She lies in the first chapter, and I asked the kids when they first lied, and they discussed it. It takes a lot of trust to do that. You can't do that when kids come to school once a week and you don't know them.

Marjorie, a Science Teacher

Teachers in the Russell Essential School program found that their efforts to personalize their classrooms meshed nicely with their efforts to promote active learning among their students. This science teacher described some new assignments that she used with her classes now that she knew their abilities better.

I've really gotten to know my students and what they're capable of. . . . Knowing their abilities and expectations is helpful. I'm trying to involve students more in all kinds of activities rather than just lecturing. . . . In at least one class, students are very willing to have discussions. . . . I'm also trying to give them more "creative" assignments, . . . like having them observe some life form and keep a journal. They were to explain Mendel's Laws to someone in a letter form: "The other day I was growing these peas and I noticed this . . ."

[Another] difference is the kinds of questions that I ask. They're more open-ended than before. And we study topics that are related to students' lives or current issues. On tests I'm finding that they never leave questions blank. They try to express themselves. It's probably tied to the open-ended questions and students seeing that I value how they approach a problem as much as the answer they come up with. We now do topics such as AIDS, genetics, and reproduction, like the "Baby M" case and surrogate motherhood.

Marjorie found that her students were more diligent about their school work when she worked to connect what her students were doing in class to their lives outside school. Additionally, she felt that the tone of the class encouraged students to take risks rather than just to give up when they did not know an answer.

The Value of Personalization

Another aspect of personalizing students' educational experiences was the resulting higher levels of involvement that many teachers felt they needed to have with their students' parents. As one teacher explained: "Because the students know that their parents and teachers are involved and concerned with their education, it becomes important for them. It provides a little added pressure to do their school work." Administrators and parents themselves described to us the positive feeling parents had when their child's teachers provided knowledgeable feedback to them about the student. One administrator described a call he received from a parent after a meeting with a teacher early in the school year.

The parent said what impressed him was that everyone at that meeting had a confirmation of their feeling that people at the school knew their child — not just by name but their learning patterns and their strengths and their weaknesses and where they need to go or where they were in their achievements and accomplishments.

Personalization was often cited by Essential school teachers in a variety of settings as one of the more positive experiences that resulted from their Coalition work. Teachers at small schools like Evans Hill and Barrett often felt that the Coalition's goal to further personalize students' education meshed nicely with what they were already doing, but that their relationships with

students were already fairly personalized. In contrast, at the larger, urban schools, such as Russell and Lewis, most efforts to personalize students' experiences had more visible effects. While teachers at these schools had often been swamped by large numbers of anonymous kids who moved through their classroom as though it were the revolving door at Grand Central Station, sharing the same group of students with a team of colleagues and having advisory periods to meet with their students meant that these teachers and students came to know each other better.

Additionally, it often made them more committed to their students. They felt they could not give up and just let students fail — which sometimes had happened when overwhelmed teachers saw no means to address pervasive problems individually. Several teachers commented that they were "much happier and much more tired" as a result of their Coalition work.

GRASSROOTS INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHERS

Another aspect of Coalition philosophy that teachers in our study sites supported was its emphasis on the need for change to come from the grassroots level, rather than to be imposed top-down. Many Essential schools viewed it as in line with Coalition philosophy to engage classroom teachers in the decisions that affected their professional lives.

Teachers and administrators who felt that their programs were more grassroots than before they joined the Coalition often mentioned specific decisions they had made to illustrate their increased involvement with the daily operation of the school and their rethinking of philosophy and practice. For instance, at Barrett, where many teachers charged that the administration was top-down in planning and implementing change, individual teachers spoke with pride of the decisions they had made since joining the Coalition — to create advisory periods, to group students heterogeneously, to design a middle school curriculum, and to review and revise the schedule annually — and of the feeling of respect that accompanied their decisions being taken seriously.

Mark, a teacher from Silas Ridge, talked of his enthusiasm about a faculty-designed professional development day:

> I think . . . the thing that's drawing me into the excitement of the Coalition of Essential Schools [is] our in-service day that we have coming up. It is an absolute, direct outgrowth of this school's involvement with the Coalition of Essential Schools. It is faculty making a decision on what should be done here. It is the ground-up approach, which I believe is part of the concepts. . . . And it has my total and complete and wholehearted support.

Joe, a teacher at Russell, described the grassroots power and concomitant sense of freedom that Russell SWAS faculty had had to design and implement their program:

> As teachers in the Essential school, we discover every day that we have opportunities to help students in ways that would have been impossible in a more traditional setting. This is due to new freedoms we assigned to ourselves as we designed our school. Russell Essential High School, a "school within a school," was not established by an edict from above. Rather, a planning team of five teachers was given a semester without teaching duties to develop all aspects of the school, from the curriculum to the grading system to the shape of the report card.

The grassroots emphasis of Coalition philosophy was deemed appropriate and appreciated by teachers who wanted to change their practice and effect schoolwide changes. While their uninvolved colleagues often felt the Coalition efforts at individual sites were not grassroots (we will discuss this perception later in the paper), those actively involved with reform generally felt it was a truly bottom-up approach with more or less support at the upper levels of district administration, depending upon the specific school. They often spoke of how the changes they had made and the opportunities to reflect on what they wanted to do gave them new energy to undertake reform and a greater appreciation of the difficulties it entailed.

REORGANIZING THE DAILY SCHEDULE

In implementing Coalition philosophy, seven of our study schools reorganized their schedules to accommodate their school's interpretation of the

Common Principles of student-as-worker and personalization. To make time for more active student learning, most schools experimented with blocks of time longer than the standard forty-five-minute period.

Each school used different scheduling arrangements. Russell, for instance, had a double-period class for all subjects but scheduled them to meet every other day. Evans Hill had a double-period English/history block three or four times per eight-day cycle and separate, single periods for English and history the remaining days. Green Valley and Lewis took a different approach to achieve the same end: they provided teams of teachers with three or four back-to-back "traditional"-length periods and let them work out their own daily, weekly, or monthly allocations of subject-matter time for their shared group of students.

Regardless of how larger blocks of time were created, Essential school teachers generally supported this change. They felt that these schedule changes gave them time to explore topics in greater depth, more flexibility in how they approached course material, and more opportunities to make students active learners.

Andy, a teacher/administrator from Barrett, said:

> [T]he double period gives [teachers] a good block of time to really do something interesting and not have to rush through it, or not have to stop and continue it the next day. And I think the kids realize that they're more accountable in the seminars, so they had better prepare for that class. . . . [T]he kids are doing more of the work so the teachers are there [almost] as a resource person in many cases. It involves a lot of planning, but I just think it's a different type of energy than standing up in front of a class and talking the whole time. [And] I think it's more enjoyable, on the whole.

At Green Valley one team found that their approach — weekly scheduling for the students on each team — was so flexible that they could include exploratory work that simply had not been possible with the previous schedule. As one team member explained:

> Now it's easier to do what *I* want because our time is so much more flexible. We design our schedule ourselves. Since I stress hands-on experiences for my students, if I want to do fieldwork with my classes, I can. Before, I used to have to impose on other faculty members in order to get that time, but we have more freedom with the schedule now. . . . It's much easier for the people on our team to set up different sorts of experiences for our students now. If we want to go out and collect fossil samples for four hours, we can do it, without disrupting anyone else's schedule.

SELF-INITIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

One aspect of Coalition reform that many teachers appreciated was the opportunity to design and conduct their own professional development activities, occasionally even sponsoring such activities for other schools. For some schools, these were week-long summer workshops or weekend retreats that allowed teachers to delve into issues at length. Other schools organized activities for schoolwide in-service days.[5]

A Barrett teacher described the workshop his faculty held to help them design their new middle-school division as well as how the staff decided to make the middle school ungraded:

> [W]hat is interesting is [that] people [who] never really talked about [these issues] before, thought about [them]. We worked together and we tore and scratched and clawed and, really, it was an incredible experience to go through during that [week-long workshop last summer (in 1988)]. We hated each other at times and we loved each other, too. But we came to agreements and compromises. And people now, in the upper grades, . . . actually . . . I think after just that one week, have been lifted to the next level — above the level of [giving] grades. [They have] realized and thought about the idea that maybe comments are more important, [that a child's] development is more important. . . . There's hope that there's a better way because no one likes to grade kids. None of us do.

Among our study schools, three (Wade, Lewis, and Green Valley) have continued to pursue Coalition-based reforms more actively than the others. One commonality among the three is that

each offers its own professional development activities. Taking a variety of forms, these activities are regular opportunities for the staff to reflect on its work and to consider new directions. Coalition Central Staff members are often asked to participate in professional development efforts. Their participation supports and develops strong ties between these schools and the Central Staff.

A Green Valley teacher reflected on the multiple benefits of a three-day in-service program that their faculty conducted for another school system:

> At first, I was scared to even go. I thought that the older teachers at this conference wouldn't listen to me. But we ended up making very good connections with the teachers there. We still keep in touch [a half-year after the summer workshop]. . . . I really felt as though I absorbed a lot.
>
> We staged a "planning session" for these teachers and brainstormed a unit for them so that they could see how we design our curriculum. After they saw how we had done it, we had them do it. . . . We started the whole workshop with a session entitled "The Problems of Teaching." But, as we were going through that, we found that some of the teams weren't even established yet. So we backtracked for them and they became more comfortable. . . .
>
> The main thing that we brought to that workshop was our experience from Green Valley High. We talked about the support administration could offer as well as what it means to be part of a teaching team and how teams operate.

Another Green Valley teacher discussed how the experience had influenced her own professional development and self-reflection:

> Before going [to do the workshop] we did a good deal of reading — Sizer, Boyer, Goodlad, *Shopping Mall High School*. We also did our own workshops in preparation, even though what we developed at Green Valley we had to change during the workshop. We also thought about how we devised our teams' "essential questions" and how we could help other teams do the same. . . .
>
> Before we did the workshop, I knew very little about essential questions — now, I'm doing lectures for student teachers at [a local college]. I did one lecture on essential questions and the next one I'm going to do is on "the first year of teaching." [Our principal] set it up. He told me to think about what I should have learned in college but didn't and then to focus on that.

Teachers at these three schools often talked about how their professional development activities prepared them not only for working with their own students but also for assisting other schools (or groups) to rethink their practices or philosophy.

A National Network of Coalition-Affiliated Schools

Another aspect of Coalition membership that many teachers found beneficial was the sense of being part of a larger network of like-minded individuals — teachers, researchers, administrators, and others — interested in nurturing and sustaining school/educational change.

People at our study schools mentioned two specifically useful components of this network. First, the Coalition Central Staff (or consultants to them) sometimes visited schools to provide feedback on schoolwide and classroom-based experiments.

A teacher from Silas Ridge High School, which worked periodically with a Coalition consultant, described the effect his presence had, particularly when school-based opposition seemed to be undermining change efforts.

> [W]hen we were having trouble working together, James came and he really got us back on track. . . . [H]is stay here was really a turning point. The Coalition Steering Committee at that point had members who were really opposed to the SWAS model and there were a lot of people [on the committee] and we weren't able to find a middle ground. Yet we had a sense that there must be a middle ground, that there must be some things that we really did agree upon. James helped us see some of those areas.

Roy, a teacher in Russell's Essential school, described the supportive assistance and encouragement he felt was offered by a Coalition staff member. Not only did the staff member work

with the two-person team as they tried to plan and teach a new unit on mythology, but she also offered some financial support for the team's experimentation.

> So while [another teacher] was doing a unit on myths, I started with the Greeks and Romans [in Western Civ]. When the Central Staff heard about what we were doing, they came to us. . . . [T]hey really believed in this approach, and they were willing to give us time to plan outside of class. We met three times with [one Central Staff member]. She's a real motivator. She made us feel like the idea could work. She was enthusiastic, but she didn't tell us how to do it. And when we didn't follow all of the nine Common Principles from *Horace's Compromise*, it wasn't a problem. . . . She gave us confidence. She said, "Do it. It's a good idea." She wasn't some phony telling us, "Oh, this is wonderful!"

The second way that teachers at our study schools benefited from the network of member schools came from conferences and workshops. One teacher described the feeling of excitement at being part of a lively exchange of ideas about what to do to improve student learning.

> I had the most exciting experience at the workshop. . . . It was such fun to have people say, "You have good ideas" and people wanting, . . . really starving for, ideas. . . . [T]he sharing that went back and forth [was great]. I felt that the workshop was very well prepared and well done and very, very worthwhile.

Another teacher described the enthusiasm that existed at a summer workshop she attended and how helpful it was to know that the network of involved teachers and schools was expanding.

> It was wonderful. . . . I met wonderful people from across the country. That was another thing that I really liked about the summer workshop: . . . I saw the same kind of enthusiasm from people from Arizona and California and Oregon. And it was . . . nice to know that it wasn't this small movement. It seems to really — hopefully — continue to generate . . . enthusiasm.

Other teachers — especially those from schools where Coalition support was limited — described the positive "energy" they felt personally when they realized that many others were struggling with the same questions as they were. The sense of a group of like-minded individuals contemplating and enacting changes was a novelty to them. For instance, Larry from Elliston High School said, "I was recharged [at workshops and conferences] thinking about what could be, knowing that other people [were] struggling with the same questions. . . . It made a world of difference."

In sum, many teachers found the Central Staff and people from other Coalition schools to be powerful supports for them. They cited personal and schoolwide benefits resulting from the ability to draw on this network of individuals and schools. And they repeatedly mentioned the important functions of Coalition gatherings — to provide support and encouragement, to exchange ideas, and to get a sense for the expansion of the Coalition's work around the country. This sense of being part of something larger was particularly important for pro-Coalition teachers in schools such as Evans Hill, Elliston, Silas Ridge, and Barrett, which were experiencing difficulties achieving consensus about the need to change at the individual school site.

More Reflection About a Vision for the School

Teachers and administrators in at least half of our study schools also talked about how the discussions about educational philosophy, theory, and practice that accompanied Coalition membership had served as effective mechanisms to help define a vision for their school as a whole. In each case teachers stressed the importance of the principal's leadership in bringing the Coalition to the school and in supporting efforts to learn about Coalition philosophy and determine how to implement it at their school. Teachers at all of our study sites contrasted their present state, which many described as purposeful, if still unfolding and somewhat chaotic, with previous conditions which had been mechanical, unthinking, and lacking a sense of shared purpose. As a Barrett teacher remarked:

> [Before the current principal,] . . . it was a little chaotic. . . . With Mrs. Washington, I don't think we had a direction. With Dr.

> Winters, yes, we do have a direction. We do have the Barrett Plan [the school's definition of the Common Principles] in full swing now. I don't know the benefits yet, [but] I think they [will be] long-term. As I see it now, I feel it's an important plus and a positive [change].

Reflecting on his principal, a Green Valley teacher discussed how the principal's vision and determination had transformed the school:

> I have three kids. They are my top priority. He has 320. They're his top priority. . . . Stuart Tucker gets the most of the people he has working for him. His life is consumed with it. He's a benevolent monarch. He is the energy behind the school. . . . He's always pushing for the teachers and superintendent to get better. He won't allow his family of 320 to be ignored. . . . We're now moving toward having exhibitions for the entire school, portfolios in all classes, designing exit-level skills for our students. . . . He's always pushing teachers to do extra summer work with money that he finds somewhere. . . . We're on the cutting edge because of Stuart's leadership. We're doing much more than just teaming. We have an advisor-advisee system and an apprenticeship program.

Finally, no matter how contentious things became at our study sites, teachers and administrators (both pro-Coalition and opposed to it) told us that their school's membership in the Coalition had made faculty as a whole more reflective about their work in their schools and their mission as teachers. Teachers reported that they were examining their own approaches in the classroom and were enthusiastic about the increased roles that shared decision making offered them. For instance, some mentioned that they had joined committees to investigate alternative governance structures for the school; others were examining possible budget reallocations or alternative ways to assess students.

As one teacher from Elliston High School — the study school that eventually voted to leave the Coalition — explained:

> I think [discussions about our Coalition affiliation] made a lot of teachers look at what they were doing in the classroom and how they were presenting their material. . . . The Coalition got us talking about what we want out of education and what direction we should be going in. [And] that was extremely healthy. . . . [We] do have people doing a lot of things right now. Which makes it difficult to get people together to talk about educational reform. But we *are* talking about reform in our building right now. We're talking about a governance reform. We do have people actively involved in a budget committee, which is new. It was new last year but teachers are getting more input into how the money the high school receives is going to be spent. And we have people involved in [an] academic honesty [committee].

Another Elliston teacher felt that while there had been problems at her school, Coalition membership had "made people more reform-minded and open to new ideas. [And] it did stimulate an awareness that some reforms are necessary, that things are not all wonderful here." A teacher who taught at a school where there were enormous controversies about what, if anything, needed to change as a result of that school's consideration of the Common Principles also felt that even in this contentious environment the conversations were beneficial: "[W]e have had the best discussions — the best arguments, the best rethinking. I mean people never used to talk about what they were doing in the classroom."

Teachers felt there were compelling reasons for their schools to be members of the Coalition. They enjoyed belonging to a network of schools that were exploring the same ideas. They felt they and their students benefited from the professional development work — workshops, conferences, retreats, and in-service days — that they often designed to address their specific concerns and needs. And generally, they felt satisfaction from knowing their students better, working to make their classrooms more personalized and more active places for their students, and from having the opportunity to experiment with change.

Opposition to Coalition Reform

Opposition to the Coalition was part of the talk about school reform we heard during our research, emerging for myriad reasons and in a variety of forms. These included skepticism about the need for change, fear that elective courses would be eliminated if Coalition philosophy were fully implemented, philosophical opposition to specific principles, and concerns about the administration's role in the Coalition reform.

In addition to opposition from the outset, other difficulties emerged as a consequence of involvement in the Coalition. For instance, many teachers who were initially indifferent to or mildly skeptical of Coalition philosophy became stridently opposed to their school's Coalition-related efforts when implementation of Coalition ideas affected them in ways that they had not envisioned. Some of their voices are included in this section. Other voices are those of pro-Coalition teachers who encountered problems as they began to initiate their reforms. Some felt overwhelmed by the work, and others found that the knowledge of their students they acquired through personalizing their relationships with students was emotionally overwhelming. Still others became disillusioned with new expectations, resistant students, and political controversies that swirled around (or embroiled) them.

SKEPTICISM ABOUT CHANGE

Many teachers and administrators in our study schools did not think that their schools or their teaching needed to change. Those who saw no need for reform often were willing to allow other teachers to experiment with change, but they themselves had neither the time nor inclination to experiment. Their refrain sounded much like this: "They can try what they want, but they can't (or better not) dictate to me what I need to do."

The three most frequently raised objections to implementing Coalition philosophy were: "It can't be done"; "We already do that";[6] and "This too will pass." The "It can't be done" response was usually linked in some way to a set of societal and/or institutional problems that constrained the school's and the faculty's effectiveness in achieving its mission, particularly in schools characterized by poor attendance, low standardized test scores, and high dropout and failure rates.

If there was any consensus regarding the need for change at these schools, it was that the larger society needed to change because present social conditions (e.g., single-parent families, poverty, drug abuse, general disrespect for authority) made it extremely difficult for successful teaching to occur.[7] One teacher at an urban school discussed his concerns about his school's Coalition program and his belief that societal change must precede school change:

> Sometimes, from my experience personally, my own observations, I see that these innovations lack substance . . . because they're done in a vacuum. . . . I'm sure the people who did the planning for the [Coalition program] are serious people and conscientious people act[ing] in the best interest of change, but first of all, is it trying to thread the eye of a needle with a camel? . . . Is it a societal problem? Is it society that has to be changed and [then] the school will do its job of educating or is the school supposed to change society?
>
> It goes back to basic educational theory. And right now, I see it as a societal problem. . . . [S]chool is a reflection of society as it is, and education is overwhelmed by society, not the other way around. . . . Changing a curriculum is doing things in reverse. . . . Society after 2:30 is not conducive to reading and studying. . . .

The "I already do it" response also impeded the development of schoolwide consensus about the need for reform. Often teachers in the programs that viewed themselves as most threatened by Coalition reforms saw themselves as already "doing it." Reflecting on a week-long summer workshop developed by her school's Coalition faculty, and echoing a reaction we heard from many elective teachers, a business teacher said: "I came to the workshop, took a week out of my summer vacation, because I knew I was going to come and hear something so different, so profound — and I didn't. I didn't learn anything that I didn't already know or that we weren't already doing."

Pro-Coalition teachers often found this reaction frustrating. As one said,

> As we did more and more activities and [there was] more and more exposure, teachers were thinking, "Yeah, well, I do that." And then it [reached] the point of, "Well, I do it, so why do we need the Coalition? I'm doing it."

Through exchanges such as these, pro-Coalition teachers slowly came to realize that whether or not they intended it, their rhetoric about the need for change sent a negative message to their less interested or opposed colleagues. Advocating change seemed to implicitly criticize the status quo regardless of intent. Furthermore, being an advocate for school change seemed to preclude approaching the topic of change neutrally.

Pro-Coalition teachers were vested in viewing change as improvement, and they were commonly perceived as judgmental by others less supportive of the Coalition. As one teacher explained:

> And I have noticed yet again what I noticed the first day I . . . ever taught here. The idea that we can be taught to teach better implies that we're not teaching very well now. And I think I'm always trying to learn, not because what I'm doing isn't any good or could be better, but because I want to learn. . . .

The third objection, the jaded "We've seen it all before" and "This too will pass," also impeded the development of a consensus about the need for change. As one veteran teacher explained: "[My school] is known for catching every new program coming down the road. So you have all these little spurts and starts and everybody gets energized and they get left. It gets dropped after a year or so." Or, as another teacher noted, a common reaction by her colleagues was: "This is just another fad that's coming through and we don't have to jump on every bandwagon — just let me teach."

Many problems discussed in the rest of this paper stem from this skepticism about or rejection of the need for change in schools. Those supporting reform in our study sites, after as much as seven years of Coalition membership, were more aware of the lack of consensus within their schools. Questions are now raised about how to "deal with" those who are opposed to change. As one teacher said:

> Hopefully [we can come] . . . to some kind of synthesis so everybody can somehow participate in what's going on in their own way . . . without having it forced [down] their throat. There are teachers, as you know, in every school that are never going to buy some of the things that the Coalition [stands for]. . . . And you can't get rid of those teachers. Obviously. And maybe we don't want to get rid of those teachers, but you also can't force them to believe in a philosophy they don't believe in. Or to teach by theories they don't feel comfortable with. Somehow I feel we have to include them, make them feel good about themselves, and value for what they're doing and still be able to remain a Coalition school working on the principles.

PROBLEMS WITH SPECIFIC COMMON PRINCIPLES

In addition to general questioning about whether change was necessary or appropriate, other teachers took exception to specific Common Principles. Universal goals, less-is-more, teacher-as-generalist, student-as-worker, and intellectual focus were the most contentious principles at our study schools, although occasionally teachers also questioned the feasibility of lowering the student-to-faculty ratio to 80:1 and the likelihood of true reform without increasing their school's budget by more than 10 percent. Teachers supportive of the Coalition also raised questions about specific Common Principles, particularly when they felt their efforts were stymied by resistance from students, colleagues, parents, and administrators.

Universal Goals

One fundamental premise of Coalition philosophy is that the goals of a Coalition program should apply to all students (CES 1985; see also Appendix A). Yet, after some schools implemented Coalition programs, some faculty challenged whether the program met the needs of *all* students. Noninvolved faculty typically voiced concerns that Coalition faculty were soft on fundamentals when there was an obvious need to emphasize structure and the "basics." As one teacher, speaking of the student population generally, remarked, "Our students are leaving this school not knowing how to read, write, and count. . . . There does not seem to be as much structure as I think students

should have." Another teacher who shared this point of view commented specifically about the Essential school program: "I think our students need discipline and, from my observation, I don't see the discipline [in the SWAS program]."

As time passed, some teachers within Essential school programs also began to question whether setting universal goals for all students was an appropriate or realistic expectation. Some wondered whether all students were prepared for the program's demands. Those in the Essential school programs who questioned this principle usually did so based on their experiences with students who did not respond to teachers' attempts to motivate them. After teaching in an Essential school program for a year, one teacher offered these impressions:

> There are some kids who just don't belong. The Essential school is not for everybody. Some kids treat the program like a joke. We should probably just give students a certain number of chances, but how many do you give? All students are entitled to fail but if it's repetitious, we need to address it because it can hinder those involved in the program. I had some of those kids in class, and they became clowns because they were so far behind in their work. We need something different for them because they can intimidate other students.
>
> In sophomore English, I was to teach the process of doing a research paper. It's tough to make that interesting but it is an essential skill. Seventy-five percent of the students responded well. I introduced students to the *Reader's Guide*, but this one student was cutting my class and now she's not done. What do I do? I tried to encourage her to do the work but it's hard to do. She thinks I'm unfair.

Intellectual Focus

In some schools, faculty feared that by adopting an "intellectual focus," as the Common Principles urged, schools would restrict students' choices and require them to take a program with a strictly academic orientation. This issue became a major point of contention for Elliston High School, as their principal explained:

> [T]hose groups that weren't dealing with the mainstream *academic* purpose of schooling . . . felt the most threatened by the Coalition principles. . . . And one of the key issues . . . [here] was . . . the question of whether or not we were going to be a comprehensive high school.

A vocational teacher from a different school made a similar point when discussing his sense of being excluded from the change process:

> My concern about the Essential school program is that it does not appear to me that there's total school involvement. . . . And once you start with a school-within-a-school concept, the total structuring of the program does not seem to involve vocational education, and that's my field. And it's my interest. And it isn't that I don't think that students are [or should be] academically oriented, but they should receive everything that we offer as a school.

The most common complaint by non-Coalition teachers about the principle of "intellectual focus" was that their school's Coalition efforts were directed toward the college-bound. Some even considered the programs "college prep." While teachers generally considered such a course of study appropriate for the college-bound, some felt strongly that forcing other students into an academically oriented program did them a disservice, especially if they were unlikely to attend college. Instead, these teachers maintained, schools should continue to offer these students vocationally oriented programs. One teacher from an inner-city high school elaborated on this reservation:

> My concern is that every child in [my] high school is not going to college. We know this. And yet the [Coalition] program is set up strictly academic with little or no room for electives. And [in the neighborhoods] where our students come from, most of these students go to work [after high school]. They're looking for immediate employment. We would like to see them do something other than fast food, which is fine to a point, but once they graduate it hurts to see them slinging hamburgers when they could be operating a computer. But they must be proficient in those areas. They must have marketable skills. . . .
>
> We have to remember where our students come from and the type of training we must

give them — and I don't feel like we are meeting their needs. There are so many things that our students have not been exposed to and I just don't think we are preparing them for the real world.

Less-Is-More

Teachers' primary objection to the Coalition's principle concerning "less-is-more" was the time it took to delve into the detail that led to the mastery Sizer suggested secondary students should attain. One teacher described a typical response to suggestions that teachers should concentrate on making certain that students learn a few things well — the most essential aspects of their field. "Everybody . . . said, 'Well I'd love to do more project work. I'd love to have them do more library work. But it takes time and I don't have time.'"

Other teachers maintained that the less-is-more approach sometimes handicapped students in other, related courses. The history teacher quoted below, who attempted some aspects of less-is-more in his classroom, was skeptical of the less-is-more approach his students' teacher from the previous year had adapted. He found the students ill-prepared and turned off by the in-depth work they had done. This teacher's objection did not address the basic idea behind Coalition philosophy but rather to its particular execution thus far at his school.

> [For example,] less-is-more in American history. . . . [T]he kids weren't learning anything at all. Last year . . . I had them as juniors and they said "Oh, we never covered it. We don't remember it." And I can tell when certain kids say, "Oh no, we never had it" because they're bullshitting you. These kids were really in the dark. For example, they [had] never heard of the closing of the frontier. This whole idea of Manifest Destiny and the frontier, they weren't aware of it. That's wrong. . . . [But they had] weeks and weeks and weeks with video . . . on the Dred Scott case. And those kids remembered the Dred Scott case — there's no question about it. But the [teachers] got so hung up on the fact that they had all the time in the world; it was over a month, I think. Dred Scott, Dred Scott, Dred Scott. The kids were turned off. They were bored. And they are weak on pretty much [everything] else. So less-is-more up to a point.
>
> Less-is-more is actually an architectural term. And it referred to this minimalism stuff. But the architects, all of them, know that if the building doesn't comply to certain mathematical specifications, then it's going to fall down. So that's what we didn't do. . . . Some [faculty] didn't figure out you had to have fundamental, not essential, but fundamental structural elements to have it mean anything at all. . . . Then you could use Coalition methodology. And they just didn't get it.

Teacher-as-Generalist

The principle of teacher-as-generalist proved particularly problematic when teachers were asked to teach outside of their specialty or when teachers perceived that they might be asked to take on new and unfamiliar roles. As one teacher recalled:

> It was [becoming] clear to people that their role [might] change, they wouldn't be able to do the same thing they have done for the last twenty-five years . . . but they would be working with students in a different way. And terms like "coaching," [and] "change of roles" were very stressful.

Many teachers were torn: they understood and accepted the importance of emphasizing the skills that students needed to acquire and yet wished to retain a disciplinary focus to their work. For many secondary school teachers, their professional identity is closely associated with their discipline — even more so at times than with being a teacher.

Student-as-Worker/Teacher-as-Coach

Fewer teachers expressed reservations about the fifth principle, that of student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach. One teacher voiced concerns about student-as-worker pedagogy that were commonly raised by skeptical teachers:

> The student-as-worker idea — great idea, assuming again that my students weren't working before I read *Horace's Compromise*. My students did a lot of work. I had some really rough students in an eleventh-grade history class who got turned on to the labor movement. They saw it as iconoclastic and, boy, did we get a lot of work out of them. So my students [have often been] workers.

> And [about] the assumption . . . [that] the students aren't working if they're listening to a lecture. . . . I've had lectures with some pretty heavy-duty professors. I remember this Marxist woman at [my] university. I had no idea what she was talking about. I was nineteen years old. I sat there and I hung on every word, sweating bullets trying to get it all down and make sense out of it. I was working like crazy. So they assume [that students aren't working during a lecture] and they're wrong. Lectures can be highly provocative.
>
> I'm the leader here. I'm the one who's guiding them where they've never been before. And presumably — at least I assume — I know the salient questions about the progressive period. Now asking questions is a part of critical thinking and I've always asked the kids to ask questions, and we've always done that. And some of them we do answer. But I'm not going to do what that teacher [at one Essential School] did and ask them what they think the main issues of sociology are before taking any sociology or taking one course. Have them ask these questions, then base a whole course on that? That's crazy.

This same teacher explained how more traditional approaches also had their place.

> I really do understand what they mean by student-as-worker: they don't want these passive students. But they overreacted completely when they said, "No teacher-centered, no lecture." Obviously that's a huge error. . . . Now if [students] go all the way through high school and never hear lectures, that's a disservice. It's irresponsible. And I suspect that originally student-as-worker simply meant getting the kids more involved.

This teacher, like many others, had reservations about giving up his role as a knowledgeable authority in the classroom. While he cited professional responsibility, enjoyment of his craft, and the desire to share his knowledge and understanding of subject matter as reasons for resisting a wholesale adoption of student-centered instruction, other teachers described their opposition to student-as-worker philosophy as rooted more in a concern about giving up control of one's classroom, no matter how temporarily, to the students.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF NEW TEACHERS

Not only were there questions about whether people fully understood and agreed with Coalition philosophy initially, but similar concerns arose as Essential school programs expanded. For instance, schools usually provided time for those first involved with their Coalition effort to plan and create a structure for their program, to develop curricula, to attend relevant conferences (often CES-sponsored), and generally to familiarize themselves with Coalition philosophy. This often involved some release time from teaching and/or funding for summer work.

However, of those teachers who joined their school's Coalition program later, none were provided release-time from teaching to explore Coalition philosophy, and the introductions they did receive were usually less in-depth and less comprehensive than those given to their veteran colleagues.

Further, as Coalition programs evolved, so did the day-to-day logistics of running a special program. At two schools this became such a pressing issue that the orientations provided new faculty stressed the logistical operation of the program, not the philosophical or pedagogical side of their work. As one teacher who joined her SWAS in its third year explained, this focus disappointed her:

> They were frustrating. We just organized our students by their math groups. I expected more about how I should be different. Other than planning that, it didn't seem different. I was looking for how this would be different for me — how [teaching in the Essential school] affects curriculum, philosophy, and teaching style too — and none of that happened. All we discussed were [grades] and grouping students.

At times the socialization process was complicated by the tendency of certain disciplines (particularly math and science) to perceive themselves as less adaptable to Coalition practices than others. Concerns with "coverage" sometimes inhibited teacher experimentation, as did an uncertainty about how to make their students more active learners in these disciplines.

Andy, a teacher/administrator at one Coalition school, discussed the problems he felt math teachers at his school encountered when trying to adapt Coalition philosophy to their classrooms:

> I still would say the math people may not be all that happy about the [double-period schedule]. I still think they're holding on to those one-period lectures where they can present the information because I don't think the math people or the math classes, in some cases, have been all that successful in using those double-period seminars, having the kids really doing the work. A lot of times it's almost the same as the lecture class, just a smaller version of it, so they really haven't seen the benefits of getting the kids to do [active] work. They haven't been using group problem-solving techniques and stuff like that.
>
> So I think if they [had] more planning and really [sat] down and [came] up with some interesting ideas for the kids to do in those two periods, I think, then, they would realize, or hopefully they would realize, that that was a good use of time, that [it] was more effective teaching.

Another factor that may have influenced the socialization of later Coalition faculty related to the reasons some teachers joined Coalition programs. At some study schools, teachers looking for a job knew that their chances would improve if they were willing to participate in the school's Coalition program. Thus, teachers might agree to team or teach collaboratively when they actually had little experience with, or even interest in, such pedagogy. In other instances, teachers already at a school perceived that it was in their best interest to affiliate with a Coalition program — otherwise, they might be transferred or lose a desirable position they had earned.

While these persons were not necessarily poor teachers, their understanding of and receptivity to Coalition philosophy varied from those who joined because of a philosophical affinity. Conversely, the ability to retain pro-Coalition teachers at the school was an area of concern in at least four of the eight study schools, all of which lost population throughout the late 1980s.

THE THREAT TO ELECTIVES AND JOBS

One of the more pervasive reasons for opposing the Coalition was the perception among non-involved faculty that implementing a Coalition program would adversely affect elective or magnet programs. Some schools, such as Barrett, saw immediate reductions in the scheduling of non-core courses for the entire school. This usually led to a rejection of Coalition ideas by teachers who felt their discipline was being discredited. Two quotes — from a foreign language teacher and an art teacher, respectively — represent comments commonly made about the perceived emphasis on core courses at Coalition schools or in Essential school programs.

> The first year, I think it was exciting because a lot of ideas were being thought about, about how we could be at the forefront of educational reform. I only found out later on that languages, my area, really is on the periphery. . . . We were more or less tacked onto the schedule and, as a result, we've been the last department to be programmed for the last couple of years, because the core subjects took precedence. . . . I've read the books that also gave, more or less, birth to the [Coalition] and, really, languages aren't important in any of them.

> Art moved, to . . . one day a week. It is two periods back-to-back — it's the double period. . . . What we're talking about is two forty-five-minute periods, an hour and a half, which was really like an hour period by the time they set up their stuff, [then] clean up and everything. They're working for an hour. In my opinion it is not enough art. Something had to go and the focus is on English, history, math, and science, and it always has been . . .

Elective teachers sometimes feared their jobs would be lost as their courses were phased out, or that they would be expected to teach outside their areas of specialization. Magnet programs, too, felt threatened by Coalition philosophy and the establishment of Coalition programs. Often the scheduling requirements were such that students could not participate in both programs, causing competition for students.

At one Coalition school with an arts magnet, a teacher from that program wrote a letter to the school's entire faculty, pursuing his concerns about the effects of the school's Essential school program on the school's arts magnet.

> Since [our school] is an arts magnet school, there should be a representative from the arts

magnet within the group of the "holy four" (English, history, math, and science). If [our school] is to continue offering a magnet program, it must not be weakened for the sake of artificial reform. . . .

POLITICAL OPPOSITION

As we have seen, Coalition efforts often encountered substantial philosophical opposition from faculty members who disagreed with various Coalition tenets. Such philosophical differences frequently served to solidify and create political divisions. Three main issues proved particularly divisive: assertions that Coalition faculty received preferential treatment, the question of who had the right to make decisions — phrased by one Coalition faculty member as "Who owns the school?" — and accusations that the effort was merely another top-down, administrative mandate, this time somewhat disguised as grassroots.

Equity

Looking back on his school's effort, a Coalition participant offered some advice on how to avoid problems in program implementation, demonstrating at the same time how questions of equity were a common political issue:

> [My advice would be] to get the whole faculty in on the planning of it. Make them totally aware of what the goals are, and the philosophy; . . . somehow allow those who want to participate, free participation. And in the actual carrying out of the program somehow equalize the teachers as far as their duties and their time — that seemed to be a prime sticking point [here]. A lot of people didn't know what was going on. A lot of people didn't care what was going on. They looked at it more or less from a selfish aspect. They said, "OK, these people have this time off, we don't. So that program is no good." I don't ever recall anyone saying the idea behind the [Coalition program] was not a good idea, just in the mechanics of it, it just didn't work out.

In some cases equity issues were "grieved" by the teachers' unions — a situation that usually increased the distance between the pro-Coalition faction and the rest of the school, no matter what the outcome. At one school teachers grieved the issue of seniority and the SWAS's right to "special program" status. One teacher explained:

> My teachers did grieve. They formed committees. They went to the union. But it was my understanding that it was the right . . . of the principal to select the teachers that he needed for special programs. We had a teacher here who was a superior, outstanding, hard-working teacher who had seniority in the English department. She grieved and she took it to the furthest step because she wanted to be a part of the [larger school] program here. . . . She wrote letters requesting the opportunity to be a part of it. I would say it was probably a conflict in personalities as to why she was not given that job. She was moved out. And they retained an individual in the Coalition of Essential Schools program who was the lowest of seniority in the department simply because he was a coach. . . .
>
> Fairness in selection, I think that should be one top priority. That means if I have a teacher in my department who is a good teacher, who is doing what she should be doing, and she has seniority, she should be retained. This teacher was heartbroken and she still is.

"Who Owns the School?"

At some of our study schools, political opposition emerged partly because some faculty felt that they were excluded from the restructuring process. They saw changes occurring around them and they were beginning to sense their effects, but they felt that they had little input into the nature of those changes. In the opinion of one non-Coalition faculty member, it was precisely this sense of being left out, of having no say in the changes that were affecting the school, that motivated many faculty to begin questioning the school's efforts:

> Essentially, I think we had a backlash that was . . . cast in terms of "Who owns the school?" I think that a portion of the faculty . . . felt threatened, not because they were bad teachers but because of this sense that ownership of the school would have to be shared or, even possibly, in their perception, given over to someone else. That was a very deep threat to this group on the faculty. . . . And by ownership, I really mean a sense of

ownership — like property — that "This is my school. My niche is here. I identify with this school. I don't ever plan to be a teacher anywhere else. . . . "

I don't consider the bulk of [the teachers who opposed the program] to be unprofessional or people who are opposed to growth. But I think it's really important that they have a sense of control over the growth [of the program] and that they not feel as if someone else is going to tell them how they have to change or how much time they have to put in. And I think that there were fairly sincere efforts to include everybody and communicate, but there were internal problems [in the Essential school] . . . that forced a lot of internal struggling to go on, that took away energy that we might have spent dealing with those people who felt on the outside.

In many instances, those faculty who came to oppose their school's Coalition affiliation were, at first, indifferent toward the effort. Yet, as some of those initially unconcerned about these reform efforts, or even supportive of the ideas *in theory*, began to realize the full ramifications of these changes *in practice*, what seemed like a good idea or, at worst, a harmless experiment became the basis for substantial contention. Moreover, the efforts of Coalition proponents often came to be perceived as more interpersonally confrontational than anything most Coalition supporters initially envisioned.

These tensions were heightened by the tendency of Coalition supporters to be persons who, prior to their Coalition involvement, wielded little power within the school. Often they were inexperienced teachers or relatively new to their school, and many were women. Relative to their previous status, these persons began to influence school life much more than they ever had prior to the introduction of the Coalition program. And, as disinterest evolved into opposition, Coalition proponents were often caught off-guard and felt somewhat overwhelmed — trying to address political issues that arose as well as pursuing the reform agenda that they had established for themselves.

Resistance to Top-Down Changes

Although some Coalition administrators were able to enlist the support of virtually their entire faculty, it was more common that teachers were at least somewhat suspect of their principal's motives for attempting to implement Coalition changes. Most often, their distrust took the form of accusations that program implementations were too "top-down." That is, that the principal had an agenda and was promoting that agenda, even if in public that principal described the program as grassroots. When discussing why faculty members were hesitant to criticize the Coalition program in her school, one non-involved teacher bluntly stated: "Because they know this is 'the baby of the boss.'" Discussing her school's Coalition program, a faculty member who came to oppose the effort noted how, in her view, the principal used her position to sway the faculty:

[The principal] seemed to have this grant money that she held over our heads and said if we vote quickly, we can have this money. If we joined the Coalition, everything would be great. And we don't want to prevent anybody from having new ideas and having an opportunity to spend all this money and do things differently. So if you were against this initial idea, you were against people trying new ideas. And who was? Nobody was.

Perceptions that Coalition programs were being forced upon a faculty by a pro-Coalition administration were often worsened by ill feelings that already existed between faculty and administration.[8] At some schools, it was known that certain faculty would oppose the Coalition effort solely because of their dislike for the principal. Some teachers had developed such poor relations with the administration that they would do nothing that might help make the principal look good in the public eye. One teacher described such a group of teachers:

There's an element of the faculty that's anti-anything-the-administration-does. . . . Maybe it's true for all schools. I don't know. And they always have a negative way of asking questions [at faculty meetings]. Everything's framed in a negative way.

Because of concerns raised by the above three issues, many schools' restructuring efforts were forced to address non-classroom-based issues. The philosophical and political became so entwined at

many schools that it was difficult to determine which concerns generated greater tension. Political maneuvering sometimes overrode concerns with school reform. This often dismayed those who were looking to put Coalition ideas into practice. As one teacher remarked:

> I don't think we ever sat down and really [asked ourselves], "What does it mean and what are the implications for my department and what are the implications for me as a teacher, or a counselor, or whatever I happen to be?" It was all in the political: "Did we do this or didn't we do that?" . . . [And] there were some issues with leadership here. . . . So to me it was more those issues than, really, that we don't believe in less-is-more.

THE EMOTIONAL TOLL

Some of the "problems" that emerged at Coalition schools might also be viewed as signs of success. For example, greater closeness with students and other faculty increased many teachers' sense of commitment to their work. For some, though, it also meant that they confronted issues and problems that they had previously ignored. In particular, this was the case for teachers who taught in urban high schools or who had substantial numbers of lower-track students. Many teachers had come to accept that, with both populations, it was common for a sizable percentage of students to leave a teacher's class through the course of the school year.

One teacher who had left a college preparatory high school to work at a comprehensive urban school explained how a more personalized environment generated increased commitment to his students as well as personal anxiety:

> [Being in the Essential school] has helped me to reassess my teaching strategies. I know it's difficult to teach here [compared with my previous school]. It can be more rewarding but it's exhausting. . . . I really questioned my thinking about teaching and I have taken more risks. I like having the responsibility for my curriculum and the program overall. I think it allows me to better evaluate my students' progress because I get to see my students as individuals. It's also led me to work harder and made me more resourceful.

> In an urban setting, with poverty and other problems, the kids you teach have problems with self-esteem, but you also have the fact of them having a lower socio-economic base, less clothing, more ties with peers, additional travel time to school, and so on. The problems build exponentially. And you're trying to reach kids from diverse settings who often have fewer language skills. That's why it's exhausting. Not only are you a teacher but you're a social worker; you may even offer medical advice to some.
>
> To reach some kids, it's not enough to disseminate information. You need to get to know the students and that takes its own toll. That's why it's so exhausting. And it's very hard to leave the school and make the night yours — you either have work to do or are thinking about students. And there are some students that I can't reach and I do think about that. But to preserve your sanity, you need to recognize that, because so many problems are so profound. You realize [school] represents a last chance for many students.

Another teacher, reflecting that his changing attitude toward student failure created new worries for him, explained:

> In the traditional setting, it was a lot easier for me to dump the responsibility for a lack of progress by a student onto the student. Now, it's nearly impossible for me. . . . Before, I could say that it was someone else's problem — I tried and it didn't work. Now, I feel more responsible for a student's progress than before.

INCREASED WORKLOAD

Teachers often reported that their Coalition involvement resulted in more work. The tasks they viewed as necessary (and as their responsibility) sometimes increased their workload to the point where it became a serious problem.

For instance, they now sought to improve student attendance and to challenge students academically. If a Coalition program succeeded in getting more students to attend school regularly (as many of our study sites with previously poor attendance rates did), faculty had more students to teach. Once students began doing more of their school

work, teachers had more work to review and assess. Once teachers began challenging their students with more active rather than rote learning, teachers had new units and projects to develop. Shifts from such traditional forms of assessment as multiple-choice exams to essay tests or research projects also entailed more work for teachers — both designing the new projects and overseeing their execution. Finally, encouraging parents to be more involved in their child's school took time. In effect, the teachers' reward for working hard and for success in each case was more work. Many of the teachers in our study schools spoke candidly about these changes, as the following two quotes illustrate:

> What I've found that has really changed since I became involved [with my school's pilot Essential school team] is that I'm doing much more research for my class plans. I used to be able to go for three weeks without developing any lessons, at the minimum. If I was bummed or feeling lazy, I would just not do any class prep, and no one would know that. I'm not that way now. It's all new. And now I'm responsible to the rest of my team, and my classes only meet four days a week, so I can't blow one off. They're all important.

> There are extreme demands on my time. . . . This has to change. Over vacation, I spent an entire day [here] — and I have a student teacher. . . . I feel we need . . . clerical support. I thought that with the Essential school program I'd teach and develop curriculum, but I'm doing lots of clerical stuff. I'm also acting like a counselor for students and that is time-consuming and I can't say to a kid that I can't see him or her. Their concerns are important. Our contact with parents is good, too, but it's [all too] time-consuming.

One disconcerting discovery that teachers in our schools made is that their workload did not diminish in subsequent years. As one teacher remarked during her second year of Coalition involvement:

> It's still very demanding. If I'm doing things right it means that I'm spending even more time on my work. I go home now expecting to work and fall asleep. The kids are now doing work and I've got to be ready for them. I have to get their papers back to them but I have a hard time getting homework back the next day all the time. It's affecting me.

DISILLUSIONMENT

Some of the issues and problems elaborated upon thus far generated another problem: disillusionment on the part of pro-Coalition teachers. They often cited as reasons for this disillusionment the increased workloads and — in their eyes — disappointing student reactions to their efforts. Other teachers became disillusioned with aspects of the Coalition's philosophy, either as implemented at their school or because they perceived that the problems they encountered revealed the limits of its applicability or problems inherent in the ideas.

Some pro-Coalition teachers became disillusioned with their colleagues regarding their commitment to Coalition philosophy as well as to their students. As one teacher explained:

> Sometimes I get discouraged because I feel that [Coalition] philosophy is not the core of people's beliefs. It's being broken down. There are lots of people in our program and there are lots of agendas. Sometimes it discourages me. Of course, we're all humans, so we're going to be different; but, to be a good educator, I think you really need to like the kids . . . and not blame them for where they are. You have to respect them to even know what they need. . . . Some teachers believe this job owes them something. . . . When I joined the program, I thought that those who were in the program agreed to go along with the philosophy of the Essential school program. But that has not turned out to be the case.

A general difficulty teachers described was that their colleagues did not fully understand Coalition philosophy. One teacher remarked: "I must admit that I'm having some problems with the rest of my team. I'm not sure that they're all 'getting it.'"

Sometimes collaboration was difficult because individual team members were unwilling participants; other times it was more because members did not get along. A final quote illustrates the disillusionment that occurred when teamed

teachers had different expectations about what collaboration entailed:

> I came in with a lot of hopes and expectations for what I could do with a social studies person. I viewed whoever was in that position as my natural, closest colleague on the team, an ally in curriculum and method. And that has always been a source of tremendous frustration for me. . . . There were just pieces of her turf that she was never willing to give up. For instance, I never saw her [course] materials. She'd say, "We're doing the Reformation." But that's not really very informative. If you really want to make links, you have to know what's being said about the Reformation . . . specifically. And I had a lot of trouble getting that kind of information.

BACKSLIDING

While some disillusionment was typical among teachers, others remained committed to Coalition ideas and their own efforts but found themselves reverting to previous practice. For instance, when teachers encountered student resistance to their efforts or when they felt overwhelmed by the work and the responsibilities associated with their program, a common response was to fall back on traditional habits. For many teachers, "new and different" came to mean "uncertain, potentially disruptive, and probably more work."

To avoid the problems that arose from trying to change traditional aspects of teaching, some resorted to time-tested practices that had kept life more manageable[9] — for example, by assigning less work and maintaining quieter (more orderly) classrooms.

At one Coalition school, a math teacher devised a curriculum that was less dependent on a standard text. As he recounted it, student resistance contributed to his "falling back into his old habits":

> There was a lot of student resistance. The big problem was that I'd fall back into my old habits if things didn't work well. I found that very frustrating. Also, without a book, students were very insecure. They were always trying to get me to tell them how to do this rather than discovering the processes for themselves. They just wanted to find out the answer rather than to understand the essence of things. For instance, when we worked on statistics, students wanted a book. They were very insecure. They kept saying, "I'm supposed to be in algebra class; where's my algebra book?" They wanted to cover traditional topics. They were so insecure without the book — not that they even knew how to use it.

Eventually, this teacher adopted a standard text. The example is instructive because it shows both the teacher's and the students' frustration when new approaches seem too different — in terms of students' past experiences as well as classroom organization and pedagogy. Many of the teachers in this study described similar reactions to pedagogical, structural, or content-based experiments.

Teachers sometimes viewed backsliding as a temporary adjustment to allow for a regrouping that would lead to renewed efforts. At times, though, it was to prove the beginning of a slow but steady return to previous practices by teachers who felt overwhelmed by and undersupported in their reform efforts. These examples also make more intelligible the often-heard requests for structure, models, or evidence about what was proving successful within the Coalition's philosophical orientation.

The following quote reflects an awareness of the Coalition's emphasis on local interpretation of the Common Principles, but a deep desire for "something to grab on to" to help anchor reform and push it forward.

> I get the impression, at least in the beginning, the Coalition [said], "Well everybody, you just go do it and you'll find out for yourself how it works and so forth." That's all well and good, but I think most people need something to grab on to, some kind of structure. It doesn't have to be something that doesn't have any flexibility; [it should be] something that says, "This is our experience in terms of what other people have done that's been successful. It doesn't mean you have to do this, but this is a proven quantity."

Reflections on the Findings

Analysis of teacher comments from eight of the original Coalition member schools collected between 1986 and 1990 through interviews, observations, and the examination of written documents has revealed several similar perceptions about the pros and cons of Coalition membership. To summarize, the seven principal reasons teachers advocated membership in the Coalition were:

- the personal and professional transformations they attributed to their Coalition-related efforts;
- the benefits they perceived for their students and themselves from increased personalization of teaching and learning;
- the grassroots nature of teacher involvement in the reform process;
- the classroom-based successes they felt emerged from new scheduling arrangements;
- the "personalized" professional development activities — often self-initiated — that they felt better reflected their needs and interests;
- the support that came from affiliating with an expanding network of schools experimenting with similar ideas; and
- the increased reflectiveness of faculty and administrators that supporters (and dissenters) attributed to open and frequent discussions about the school's philosophy/vision.

These reasons for supporting Coalition membership are focused, for the most part, on positive consequences for students and teachers and on what goes on in the classroom. This is an important point, for the classroom relationship among student, teacher, and material was the original focus of Coalition reform efforts and, in fact, the intent of the Common Principles was to refocus attention on this relationship.

The reasons teachers opposed the Coalition may be summarized as follows:

- questions about the need for each particular school and individual to change;
- philosophical and practical difficulties with specific Common Principles, such as universal goals and teacher-as-generalist;
- incomplete socialization of teachers to Coalition programs, which resulted in inconsistencies and resentment;
- threats perceived by teachers to elective courses and jobs that would accompany an intellectual focus and a rethinking of the notion of a comprehensive high school;
- political concerns such as equity, ownership of the change process and the school, and the administration's role in the reform initiative;
- the emotional drain that teachers experienced as they personalized their classrooms and dealt with opposition to their work;
- the cumulative effects of the increased workload on teachers who were implementing reform; and
- the disillusionment teachers felt when students did not respond to their efforts and/or when teaming with other teachers proved problematic.

By itself, this list is less clear than the reasons for supporting the Coalition, in large part because these reasons came from two distinct categories of people: those who were opposed to the Coalition from the start, and those whose opposition developed after Coalition-related reforms were undertaken. It might be useful to look at these two types of opposition separately.

Teachers Opposed from the Start

Four of the eight reasons for opposition to Coalition membership applied more often to these teachers — they questioned the need for change, expressed strong disagreement with aspects of the Coalition's philosophy, felt that implementing Coalition ideas would result in job loss, and often voiced political reasons for their opposition. Frankly, *few of these teachers were ever convinced to change their minds, and at four schools they have been effective at stalling comprehensive attempts to implement Coalition ideas.*

Only where these teachers have been dismissed or reassigned elsewhere in the system have pro-Coalition teachers been able to effect more comprehensive, schoolwide reform. And where these actions have been taken, some teachers have voiced an allegiance to Coalition ideas that they

may not completely hold in order to retain their positions.

Further, *most of the teachers at our study schools who were initially indifferent or uncommitted to the reform efforts quickly joined these teachers in outright opposition to the Coalition when they began to experience the consequences of change efforts undertaken at their school.* By adding to the numbers of opposed teachers, they have added to the effectiveness of efforts to stall or terminate Coalition reforms at the schools.

Teacher Opposition That Developed during Implementation

The final three reasons for opposition (that it was emotionally draining, that the workload became intolerable, and that teachers became disillusioned with what they viewed as their partial success) — combined with another reason (incomplete socialization to Coalition ideas) — often resulted in the backsliding behavior that tended to accompany an emerging opposition to the Coalition. While the opposition that emerged in this way had real (and often negative) consequences for individual teachers and for the school as a whole, it usually was not based on a disagreement with Coalition ideas. Rather it was the result of the perceived impossibility of achieving the reform's ends. *This disillusionment was sometimes caused by the often escalating resistance to new ideas that teachers confronted in their classrooms and among their colleagues, but just as often could be viewed as the result of initial "successes" of reform efforts at the school.*

As programs or experiments began to take hold, two consequences emerged: opposed teachers strengthened their criticism, and supportive teachers' workloads continued to increase. When manifestations of success were dismissed as a result of preferential treatment or special conditions, exasperated and overworked teachers felt even more attacked and vulnerable. Rather than diminishing over time, tensions often gained strength from the opposition's ability to use specific examples from the school to challenge the Coalition's ideas, rather than the more abstract or hypothetical examples that had accompanied preimplementation debate. This proved especially trying because criticisms voiced by opponents were then taken personally by pro-Coalition teachers. Communication between pro- and anti-Coalition teachers continued to worsen.

In concert with feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work and the extra time that teachers were committing to make reforms happen, these renewed criticisms were sometimes the straws that broke the camel's back. Some teachers began to "backslide" — return to aspects of their previous classroom and schoolwide practices — in an attempt to reduce the pressure they felt and/or to regain some semblance of control over their lives. Others maintained their current activities, but made it clear that they would not take on additional responsibilities and that they could not much longer sustain the pace that had been set to date.

Teachers talking about why they like or dislike Coalition principles and initiatives at their schools reveals much about the Coalition-inspired reforms and perhaps something about the change process more generally. The classroom-based experimentation that teachers perceived as successful inspired confidence in the reform ideas and a sense of empowerment among involved teachers. Classroom-based change could be a powerful positive outcome of a school's participation in the Coalition, regardless of the outcome of schoolwide efforts at change. Opposition could be a powerful block to schoolwide change from the start, but also could emerge as a result of the initial efforts (particularly if they were deemed successful according to members of the school community's definitions of success). Both forms of opposition could and did impede further reform efforts.

Sarason (1990) has argued that for school reforms to be effective they must serve the interests and needs of teachers as well as students. Effective reforms, he said, will make schools more humane places within which to teach and learn. Both Sizer and Sarason, along with many other educational researchers, have stressed the fundamental interconnections of all aspects of school life. Further, Sizer (1989) has emphasized the fundamental interconnection of the Coalition's Common Principles.

We suggest that the second form of opposition — opposition that emerges as a result of limited successes and the stresses that are associated with trying to implement reforms — results from the beginnings of a challenge that reform efforts are making to this fundamental interconnection of all aspects of school life. The dual challenge for those interested in sustaining and deepening school change efforts is: 1) to overcome the backlash

tendencies that emerge in schools when some experimentation proves successful enough to heighten opposition to change; and 2) to support teachers who start to backslide in response to increased workloads, tensions, and the disillusionment that may result from limited success and heightened controversy from the backlash. Otherwise, the reform process itself risks turning schools into even *less* humane places in which to work than the pre-reform schools had been.

Further, in assessing school reform efforts such as the Coalition, it is essential to bear in mind something that Seymour Sarason (1992) claims was perhaps the most important lesson of previous reform efforts. "If anything has been learned from past efforts to reform schools," he says, "it is this: At best you will only be partially successful."

The trick, teacher' remarks suggests to us, is to make it more likely that the partial success of a well-intentioned school reform effort will not be completely swamped by the increased contentiousness that is likely to accompany it or by the personal costs that have been accumulated in attaining it.

Notes and References

NOTES

1. A Study of High Schools generated three books: *Horace's Compromise* (1984) by Sizer; *The Shopping Mall High School* (1985) by Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen; and *The Last Little Citadel* (1986) by Robert Hampel.

2. The city school system consists of seventeen high schools. There are five "academic" high schools and three vocational/technical schools, all designated as magnet schools to which students must apply and meet entrance requirements in order to enroll. The nine remaining schools are neighborhood comprehensive high schools. The top students in the city generally attend the academic or vocational/technical schools, with the remaining students entering the comprehensive high schools.

3. As agreed upon by the faculty, abstentions were counted in the second category, as neither opposed nor willing to participate actively.

4. The power of these personal testimonials was recognized by those within member schools and by the Coalition staff, who often asked the most articulate supporters to speak about their personal changes and their effects in the classroom at conferences and workshops.

5. In discussing the literature on professional development activities, Smith and O'Day (1990) observed that professional development budgets are often limited and highly susceptible to budget cuts. (See also Guskey 1986, Little et al. 1987, and McLaughlin 1990.) Teachers who select their own professional development activities report it to be a more positive experience, and a study by Purkey and Smith (1983) suggests a positive effect on student achievement. Barth (1990) discusses the importance of schools' using professional development to build consensus about change and to work to improve their schools. Self-initiated professional development activities were not the rule at any of our schools before Coalition membership. Many experimented with them during the four years of our research. There has been little, if any, research on the efforts of schools to initiate their own professional development.

6. These first two phrases were heard so often that it became common at professional development activities for Central Staff members to request that workshop participants agree, for the length of the session, not to say either.

7. Others, for example Orlich (1989) and Hatton (1989), have also found that teachers feel that other factors, such as students' home environments, rather than the teaching approach or classroom organization, are what impede student success in school.

8. For discussions of the tensions between teachers and administrators see, for instance, Lortie (1975) and Hargreaves (1980).

9. See Sizer (1984), Sizer (1992), and Powell, Farrar, and Cohen (1985).

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APPENDIX A

The Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as - deliverer - of - instructional – services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation — an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

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